

Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), today said, I will again be an original co-sponsor of a bill introduced by Congressman Peter King (R-NY) expressing the sense of Congress that the President should grant John Arthur `Jack' Johnson - the first African-American Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World - a posthumous pardon.

"Jack Johnson was convicted under a perverted application of the Mann Act in a racially motivated trial in 1913, which diminished his athletic, cultural, and historic significance, and tarnished his reputation. I was the only co-sponsor in the 108th Congress.

"The Jack Johnson Story is being told in a new and provocative Ken Burns PBS documentary, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, which explores the life and times of this great pugilist, who has often been overlooked but dominated opponents inside the ring and sparred with America outside the ring over issues of race and personal freedom - mainly over his relationships with white women. In 1910, Congress passed the White-Slave Traffic Act (commonly known as the `Mann Act'), which outlawed the transportation of women in interstate or foreign commerce `for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose.' This act was used to convict Johnson, after which he fled the country, but later returned to serve nearly a year in the Leavenworth (Kansas) Federal Prison.

"The Ken Burns documentary is the first step in gaining public support for a pardon. I expect President Bush's support since, when he was Texas Governor, he recognized March 31 - Johnson's birthday - as Jack Johnson Day in Texas. Mr. Johnson was born to former slaves in Galveston, Texas in 1878. He was Heavyweight Champion from 1908 to 1915.

"John L. Sullivan and other white heavyweights refused to fight Jack Johnson because he was Black. Tommy Burns gave him a chance at the title in 1908 - for which he was roundly criticized - and Burns lost. A national effort to find a `Great White Hope' to defeat Johnson finally ended when undefeated Heavyweight Champion Jim Jeffries came out of retirement and fought Johnson in `The Battle of the Century' on July 4, 1910 in Reno, Nevada. Johnson's victory over Jeffries triggered race riots nation-wide similar to what happened after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated..

"Jack Johnson supported this nation during World War II by encouraging citizens to buy war

bonds and by participating in exhibition boxing matches to promote the sale of war bonds. He died in an automobile accident in 1946.

"Jack Johnson paved the way for African American athletes to participate and succeed in racially integrated professional sports in the United States. He was wronged by a racially motivated conviction prompted by his success in the boxing ring and his relationships with white women. The criminal conviction of Jack Johnson unjustly ruined his career and destroyed his reputation. President Bush should grant a posthumous pardon to Jack Johnson to expunge from the annals of American criminal justice a racially motivated abuse of the prosecutorial authority of the federal government, and to recognize Jack Johnson's athletic and cultural contributions to society," Jackson concluded.